



# Women in Steel:

## Progress & Perspectives



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#### Where did your education and career start?

I was raised as an “Army brat” and often think of my childhood as the foundation of my education. Living in places that most children never get to see shaped my perspective in profound ways, and being a military child allowed me to develop independence and strong social skills. Frequent moves meant relying on family and our very close circle of fellow military families. I was afforded the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of a child; it was amazing. Living abroad creates a natural curiosity in children. I wanted to know about everything I saw, everyone I met and anything I did not understand. This desire for knowledge has never left me.

I always had a strong desire to achieve something bigger for myself. I wanted to be the first in my family to graduate from college. Ironically, I ended up graduating second; my sister who graduated with me was lower in the alphabet, and she walked the stage right before me — a fact she has never let me forget. I attended the University of Houston, where I earned a degree in accounting with a minor in business administration. My grandfather told me, “As long as you know the logic of accounting, you can do any job in business you want.” What I genuinely wanted was to see things being built.

#### Why did you choose the steel industry?

Growing up in small European towns meant I was primarily surrounded by old architecture. While I found it fascinating, I really had a desire to be part of building the future. Anytime we visited a big city I was intrigued by the modern buildings. Before college, I began my career in construction on the steel distribution side of the industry. I learned every aspect of structural steel, from size ranges, to warehouse operations, to buying, learning mill producers, logistics, accounting and management. This experience in distribution exposed me to every segment of the market that used steel. Not just buildings and structures, but also shipbuilding, manufacturing, oil and gas, automotive, heavy equipment, and HVAC.

When I left distribution, I took with me a deep understanding of an industry that contributed to building America in more ways than just structures. I left distribution with a skill set that has not only helped me advance my career but also helped me better teach and mentor others in the business.

#### Tell us how you have advanced your career.

Starting in steel right out of high school meant beginning at the very bottom. My first job was as a receptionist at the large steel distributor, Intsel. I very quickly realized that was not the role for me. Fortunately, Intsel allowed me to go to college, something they encouraged me to do. After graduation, I quickly advanced in the company and began in purchasing, becoming the purchasing manager. Driven by my need for knowledge, Intsel moved me through various roles, always offering something new and

exciting to learn. I encourage all those I mentor to find a place to work that supports education and promotes your desire to learn and grow.

Eventually, I moved to Arizona with another steel distributor. While in Arizona I discovered Schuff Steel Co., a leading structural steel contractor. I was excited to find a home at a company that was literally building America. Schuff Steel and DMB Global have been my home for many years now and where I will soon retire from after 40-plus years in the construction industry. Schuff is a company that encourages creative approaches to building and always seeks innovative ways to bring a project to life.

I have always been interested in the process of transforming bare land into something remarkable, whether it's a high rise, casino, stadium or hospital. At Schuff Steel, the team-oriented approach to building allows everyone to contribute to the success of each project. I appreciate the support from the leadership at Schuff and their recognition of employees' desire to learn and their encouragement of growth.

### What are you most proud of in your career?

I am proud of so many things in my career, but I am most proud of the team I have built at Schuff. Hands down, there is nothing better than picking your team, mentoring them, and seeing them grow and contribute to the success of your company.

I believe that every company has its own unique greatness. When I stepped into a leadership role at Schuff, I was fortunate to have talented leaders to mentor me along the way — leaders whose focus is on employee growth and potential. I am honest when I say I have made so many mistakes, but my leaders recognized my potential and supported me throughout. That is the brilliance of a company that promotes servant leadership, learning, growing and belonging to the team that creates success.

### Why do you feel diversity and inclusivity are important in the workplace, and the steel industry as a whole?

The best form of diversity and inclusivity is when it is instinctive; when it's so natural and ingrained it becomes invisible. I believe that this should not even be questionable. Everyone should be viewed as an individual — regardless of gender, race, religion or anything else. Diversity and inclusivity should be the core values of every company's belief system. Throughout my career I have worked in a male-dominated business, yet I have never felt excluded or like I had fewer opportunities because of my gender. It is important that we forge our own ways; our personal success should not be based on race, religion or gender.

I strongly support individual accomplishment. Working at companies that choose servant leadership as a fundamental part of management means the focus is on the people and helping to promote their success. Today, I see women thriving as project managers, executives, salespeople, plant supervisors, steel erectors, leaders,

developers, designers, strategy creators and so many other things in steel. This is clear just walking through my company. I am proud of how far construction has come in 40 years.

That said, I still believe there is progress yet to be made. I believe there should be more representation of women in executive and senior leadership roles, with their perspective and voices meaningfully included in decision-making.

### What advice do you have for girls who are interested in pursuing a career in a field that is typically male-dominated?

For any person wanting to be part of the building world, I encourage them to gain knowledge and display their passion for growth in the part of the steel industry they have chosen. Make sure your voice is heard, through hard work, commitment and standing out. Work hard to earn respect from your peers and work hard to stand out in the crowd. We all have the ability to create our own destiny, but it requires us to seek out opportunity and knowledge. I also strongly believe the opportunity for women in construction and all steel-related industries is limitless. Take advantage of that.

Knowing your audience and understanding their expectations will help lead you to success. Find and work for a company that supports creativity, servant leadership, equal opportunity and promotion. Remember, when interviewing, you also have an opportunity to interview the company, so make sure you are going to work for a company that allows for growth and recognizes talent regardless of gender. Seek leaders that support your growth opportunities and your natural talents. Ask the right questions during an interview and express your desire to be successful in your company.

### Do you have any professional book recommendations that you'd like to share?

My entire career has been rooted in teamwork and understanding your audience. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* offers great insights into the dynamics of teams, how conflict can lead to success and how to build trust within a team. These are concepts we embrace at Schuff Steel as a foundation for success.

For women just starting out, I recommend *Likeable Badass: How Women Get the Success They Deserve*. It highlights the fine line we all walk to find balance between ambition and our desire to grow with the perception others have of us. This book helped me understand that my goals could be reached if I understood corporate acumen and peer relationships. It's a book worth reading.

Success is not always about the books we read, though; it's often about understanding people. Whether we learn this from books, or by attending classes, seminars or training, the ability to understand our audiences and learn how to interact with co-workers is invaluable.

